

Field Report

Boise Front Bureau of Land Management Units

■ 1.0 Summary

The Boise Front is often referred to as the Boise foothills area that is located in the north-eastern portion of Boise, Idaho. Use of the area has changed significantly since the 1800s, when it was used by the military as a target area. In the 1960s, after the military ceased use of the area, off-road vehicles moved in. Hill climbing was a popular activity that damaged the sandy hills (see Figure 1). In the 1970s, a system of off-road trails was initiated as a means to contain impacts to the natural environment. In the late 1980s through the 1990s, residential/commercial growth in Boise and an explosion in mountain biking in the area have essentially eliminated the off-road activities.

Figure 1. View of Boise Front Area



Development pressures in the Foothills area have resulted in collaboration between the city, Ada County, BLM, U.S. Forest Service and other local interests in establishing the Foothills Plan. The plan, which was adopted by the Boise City Council in March 1997, is part of the Comprehensive Plan. Since the foothills is a specialized development area, its growth policies are included in a separate document (the Foothills Plan), the policies are consistent with and subject to the same opportunities for review and revision as other land/area types.

In general, the Foothills Plan is intended to promote the following policies:

- Foothills development should not create undue traffic impacts on neighborhoods.
- Foothills development should be clustered to preserve natural open space. The western foothills (west of 36th Street) should be the highest priority development area in the foothills.
- The central foothills (between 36th and 8th Streets) should be developed with caution, due to neighborhood traffic impacts.
- The eastern foothills (east of 8th Street) should be the highest priority area for preservation of wildlife habitat.
- A network of common open spaces and continuous recreational trails should be developed in the foothills.

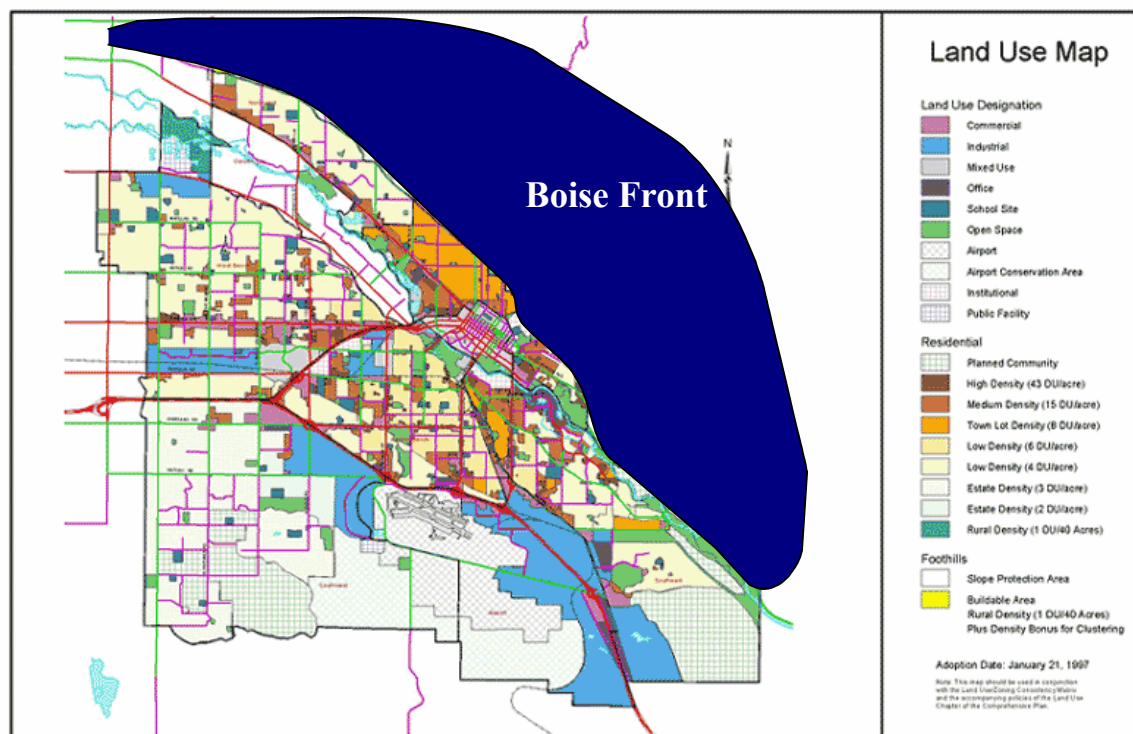
As part of the transportation planning process, the Loop Road Plan has been developed. The purpose of the plan was to identify potential corridor alternatives which would protect older parts of the community that are located between the Foothills area and other parts of the Boise metro areas. A need for the transportation improvements was identified because vehicle traffic from Foothills area development currently is directed through the older portions of northern Boise. Corridors carrying the increasing levels of traffic are generally two-lane collector or minor arterial streets.

Of primary concern in the Foothills area are the competing interests of development and outdoor recreation. The area is a popular mountain biking area on public lands, but a significant amount of the land in the Foothills area is privately owned. Many of the bike trails (open to the public) in the area that connect public lands are on private land. With the competing interests in the area, and no desire by any party to compromise their position, there is the continual threat of closing off public access to trails by fencing the property. Closing the public access on private land would result in a severely disjointed trail system.

■ 2.0 Background Information

2.1 Location

The Boise Front is located in the foothills just to the north of the metropolitan area of Boise, Idaho (see Figure 2). It encompasses 75,000 acres of land. The western boundary is Highway 55 and the eastern boundary is Lucky Peak reservoir. The area is accessed via residential streets and arterial roads from Boise. The Boise Front area originated as a military base at the turn of the century and has evolved into an outdoor recreational area for the citizens of Boise.

Figure 2. Boise Front Area

2.2 Administration and Classification

The Boise Front is managed by the Department of Interior's BLM.

2.3 Physical Description

The Boise Front is composed of arid foothills overlooking the Boise metropolitan area. The foothills are primarily covered with grassland. The whole foothills area is fragmented with various types of owners. Federal (BLM), state, and privately owned property are interspersed throughout the area. Grasslands are interrupted by residential subdivisions. The breakdown in ownership for the area is as follows:

- 41,000 acres privately owned;
- 12,000 acres BLM land;
- 6,500 acres USFS land;
- 4,000 acres Idaho State Department of Lands; and
- 3,000 acres Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

The area is laced with numerous off-road bicycle and motorcycle trail systems and provides recreation for the Boise area.

2.4 Mission and Goals of the Boise Front

The mission and goals for the Boise Front area have been developed through a multi-jurisdiction group including BLM, Ada County, City of Boise, local residents/business interests and the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD). Goals for the area are:

- Share growth throughout the community and reduce the impacts of urban sprawl through controlled development of appropriate Foothills areas pursuant to standards and conditions that are protective of the Foothills, wildlife and neighborhoods.
- Reduce or minimize adverse environmental impacts resulting from Foothills development, and mitigate these impacts when they are unavoidable. Preserve, enhance, and where appropriate, create wildlife habitat areas in the Foothills.
- Retain and preserve, and in appropriate cases enhance, the natural scenic values of the Foothills.
- Preserve and enhance recreation and open space features in the Foothills.
- Preserve, enhance and protect neighborhoods in developed areas from unacceptable adverse impacts resulting from Foothills development.
- Provide efficient, cost-effective and environmentally sound transportation systems, infrastructure systems and public services which protect wildlife and habitat areas, surface and groundwater quality, and flood control measures.

2.5 Visitation Levels and Visitor Profile

There are a total of seven identified “sites” within the Boise Front. In general, these are trailheads. Documented below are the estimated use for 1998:

• Boise Front Recreational Site:	11,000 visits
• Dispersed use:	35,000 visits
• Lower Hull’s Gulch Trailhead:	3,300 visits
• Miller Gulch:	1,000 visits
• Rocky Canyon:	500 visits
• Trail 4 turnout:	500 visits
• Upper Hull’s Gulch Trailhead:	<u>1,800 visits</u>
• Totals:	53,100 visits

Major use of the Boise Front area is by recreational users from the Boise area. The extensive trail system is used by mountain bikers, motorcycle riders, hikers, and horseback riders. The trail systems provide a recreational “outlet” close to home for the residents of Boise. In addition to recreational users of the trail systems, the Boise Front serves as a

“living classroom” for the students of the area. Finally, many people call the Boise Front area home. There has been strong residential growth in the foothills area, with more planned.

■ 3.0 Existing Conditions, Issues and Concerns

At present, the Boise Front is compartmentalized into various types of land ownership. The trails developed in the area use many different lands for passage. In fact, to access some BLM areas in the Boise Front by the trail system, users must pass over private land. At present, much of the private land is undeveloped and there are easements on the private land for user access. Public access is, however, being threatened by continuing private residential growth.

The Boise Front area is comprised mainly of arid rangeland. Thus, the area is susceptible to range fires. Locations where range fires have removed the vegetative cover, which is slow to re-grow, are susceptible to major mudslides when rains do come. As a result of the combination effects of range fires and the following erosion of the soil, there are projects underway to control runoff from the Boise Front.

3.1 Transportation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

There are several local concerns associated with the Boise Front Area, both within the Front itself and in the adjoining neighborhoods. Erosion is a major concern for the Boise Front on designated and non-designated roadways. The Boise Front area is composed primarily of deposited wind born soils. Little compaction of the soil occurs. Thus, erosion is a significant issue (see Figure 3). Typical rural roadway section designs (no curb and gutter, no enclosed storm sewer) have had the tendency to create erosion problems at curves. Runoff is transported across the paved surface at a curve and meets resistance at the adjacent side of the roadway. Over time, runoff water etches its own path through the adjacent ditch. Most times the path is undesirable.

In addition to erosion, traffic congestion in surrounding neighborhoods is a concern. Since the access to the Boise Front area is through residential areas, the citizens of the Boise neighborhoods are concerned with the increased residential and commercial development in the Boise Front area and the added traffic going through their neighborhood that results.

Bogus Basin Ski Area, which is accessed through the Boise Front, also has an impact on traffic in winter months. Like traffic to residential areas in the Boise Front, the Bogus Basin Ski Area traffic must pass through residential neighborhood streets in Boise and the Boise Front area to get to their destination (see Figure 4).

Figure 3. Boise Front Roadway Erosion



Figure 4. The Road to Bogus Basin Ski Area and the Boise Front



3.2 Community Development Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The community of Boise recognizes that the Boise Front is experiencing residential growth while at the same time being utilized for recreational opportunities. The city has implemented a “Boise City Foothills Plan” for the Boise Front. The goal of the foothills plan is “to share growth with the community and to reduce the impacts of urban sprawl, controlled development of appropriate Foothills areas shall be pursuant to standards and conditions that are protective to the foothills, wildlife and neighborhoods.” With this

foothills policy, the city is trying to balance the needs of a growing community with the conservation of natural and recreational resources.

3.3 Natural or Cultural Resource Conditions, Issues and Concerns

Natural resources are an important part of the Boise Front. The Boise Front is a critical deer and elk feeding range and seasonal migration corridor. It also has sensitive plant species such as Aase's Onion. Residential and commercial development in the area impacts both plant and animal life.

The Boise Front provides a high-quality outdoor classroom with a wide variety of watchable wildlife close to the city that is easily accessible. Since the Boise Front is close to the metropolitan area, many of the residents can use it to "get into nature."

Finally, since the Boise Front overlooks the City of Boise, it makes a stunning backdrop of natural resources for the city.

3.4 Recreation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

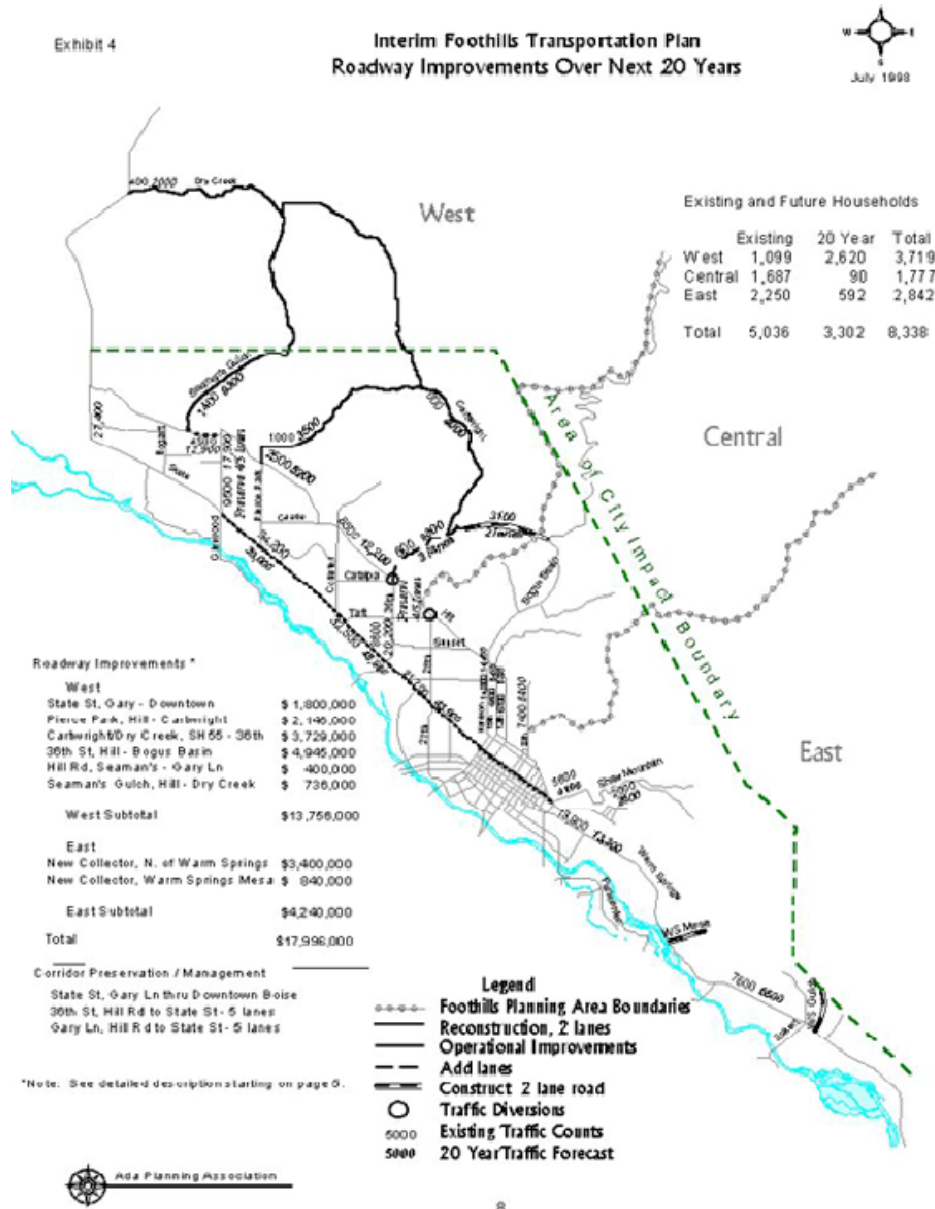
Recreational use is a major concern within the Boise Front. Since the Front area has a mixture of ownership (public and private), there is a concern that trail systems will become fragmented as subdivision growth occurs. The primary challenge for recreational users is the permanent establishment of a cohesive trail system.

■ 4.0 Planning and Coordination

4.1 Area Plans

Plans for the Boise Front are documented below:

- BLM: Continue focus on trail management run-off impacts and acquire additional key parcels (parcels which create connections between BLM/public property) as they become available.
- Promote/implement the *Ridge to River Pathway Plan*. Stewardship of the program is the responsibility of the BLM, Ada County, Boise City, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and the Idaho Department of Lands. Through this program, a system connecting the Foothills area to the Boise River and the Snake River through greenbelts, off-road paths and on-street corridors is being investigated.
- Ada Planning and others: Implementation of the improvements included in the Interim Foothills Transportation Plan. Improvement proposals included in the plan are displayed in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Interim Foothills Transportation Plan Roadway Improvements

4.2 Public and Agency Coordination

The BLM, Ada Planning, Boise City, area neighborhood and business associations, Idaho Department of Lands, the U.S. Forest Service and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game working closely in the management of the Boise Front.

■ 5.0 Assessment of Need and System Options

5.1 Magnitude of Need

Potential needs for the area are outlined in the Interim Foothills Transportation Plan (see Figure 5). An estimate of Foothills area needs was documented at approximately \$18 million. In general, improvements were to the roadway system. Of primary interest was the 36th Street corridor. The intent of this corridor was to provide a bypass of the developed areas between the Foothills area and downtown Boise.

In addition to the roadway improvements documented in the Interim Foothills Transportation Plan, additional funding for trails development (land acquisition and construction) and maintenance are of primary interest.

5.2 Range of Feasible Transit Alternatives

Uses in the Foothills area are primarily recreational, with mountain biking being the most prominent. Foothills activities on public lands do not lend themselves to transit applications.

■ 6.0 Bibliography

Update: Cascade Resource Area, July 1998.

Interim Foothill Transportation Plan, Ada Planning Association, July 20, 1998.

Portions of the Bogus Basin Ski Area Master Plan, December 1994.

Idaho Trails Plan, Idaho State Parks and Recreation, 1993.

Boise City Foothills Policy Plan, City of Boise, Idaho.

■ 7.0 Persons Interviewed

Tim Breuer, BLM

Mike Shirley, Bogus Basin Ski Area

Donna Griffin, Ada County Parks and Waterways

Hal Simmons, Chief, Comprehensive Planning, Boise City

Charles Trainor, Project Manager, Ada Planning